



ICPA

ILLINOIS
COLLEGE
PRESS
ASSOCIATION

Established 1982
Affiliated with the
Illinois Press Association

Nov. 21, 2025

Dear Media Program Advisers and Editors:

The time is here again to select and submit your entries for the Illinois College Press Association Contest. Enclosed you'll find the contest rules, categories and directions for online submission. Please read the materials carefully, and if you have any questions, send an email.

We are using the services of the Illinois Press Association's contest coordinating website, ACES. All entries will be submitted in electronic format to the website listed in the attached materials. Please follow the enclosed step-by-step instructions for how to submit your materials to the site.

The site will open for submissions on Dec. 1, 2025. You can use this [planner](#) to organize your entries.

Entries must be received/time stamped no later than **11:59 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025.** **There is no grace period.** Categories will be judged by professional journalists across Illinois and other parts of the country. For most categories, media programs compete in divisions determined by undergraduate enrollment, except for 12 open categories in which all media programs compete against each other.

All awards, including first, second and third places and honorable mentions, will be announced at the annual ICPA convention, Feb. 20 - 22, 2026.

If your news organization is not currently affiliated with the ICPA or your membership has lapsed, now is the time to renew. Those forms will accompany these materials. Questions about membership should be directed to ICPA Secretary-Treasurer Tammy Merrett at tmerrett@siue.edu.

To enter the contest, your publication(s) needs to be an active ICPA member.

Thanks for your participation!

Jackie Spinner
Columbia College Chicago

2nd Vice President
Illinois College Press Association
jspinner@colum.edu

2025 ICPA Contest Rules and Instructions

Member news organizations and students on staff during the contest period are eligible to enter. While a news organization must be an active member of the Illinois College Press Association to enter the contest, there are no entry fees.

All entries must have been published between Dec. 1, 2024, and Dec. 31, 2025. Entries must be submitted through the ACES contest system. Directions attached.

Questions can be submitted to:

Jackie Spinner, Columbia College Chicago, ICPA 2nd Vice President
jspinner@colum.edu (Please put ICPA in the subject line)

Deadline for submitting entries: Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025, at 11:59 p.m.

- General info about ACES follows. Improperly prepared or late entries will be disqualified.
- We reserve the right to cancel a category if there is a lack of entries.
- All entries must be the work of a student member of a student news organization staff that is an active member of the Illinois College Press Association.
- Please limit the number of students listed for awards. Cite the person whose work is most reflected for each entry. A second person may be named if they contributed significantly to the overall story, design, etc. Do not list every editorial board member for editorials; instead, name the person who wrote the editorial or “staff.” **Entries with three or more entrant names will be credited to “staff.”**
- *Please only enter your best work, not just something in every category.* Judges get very frustrated when they have to evaluate dozens of entries of mediocre work only entered because media outlets feel they should enter every category, no matter the quality of the entries.
- EACH PUBLICATION MAY HAVE MULTIPLE PEOPLE SUBMITTING ON ITS BEHALF, BUT YOU MUST COORDINATE ON YOUR END.
- ICPA has adopted an AI disclosure policy. For this contest, “AI tools” include any generative or machine-learning systems used to create or alter text, images, audio, video, data or research. Any use must be disclosed at submission with a brief

description of how the tool was used. Enter in the notes section of each entry.

Important Reminders & Changes for the 2025 Contest

- The Multimedia Reporting category has been replaced with Video Storytelling. This category recognizes a single, edited video that tells a fact-based story using strong visual reporting. Entries should be primarily video-driven. Videos produced solely for social media platforms—including but not limited to Instagram and TikTok—are not eligible. Judges will not view more than the first 10 minutes of a video.
- Supplement submissions in the Open competition are not exclusive to print. *A digital supplement is a standalone, themed package of coverage published online as a cohesive unit. It may include a collection of related stories, videos, photos, graphics or interactive elements presented together on a single URL or landing page. The package should have its own headline or title, distinct layout and clear editorial focus, separate from regular content.*
- The following categories allow print or digital submissions: Front Page Layout, Opinion Page(s), Feature Page Design and Sports Page Design. *A digital submission must be part of a standalone package of coverage published online as a cohesive unit with a landing page. It cannot be a screenshot of a web section front or home page.*

Other Category Notes

- Any member media program may submit one entry for each Open competition. For all other categories, media programs compete in divisions determined by undergraduate enrollment.
- **Schools may submit one entry per category for the Open competition and two entries per category for the competition by Division, unless otherwise noted.** Submit only entries of high quality that merit attention. Screenshots (.pdfs) of work from the member media program's website are allowed in the appropriate categories.
- For Photos, a photo published only online may be entered, even if it was not published in print.
- For Best Sports News Story, please note this *does not include game stories*. There is a separate Best Sports Game Story category.
- For Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Coverage: Eligible coverage will include but not be limited to race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and other differences. Judges will consider depth of coverage of the overall entry. An entry will consist of up to three pieces from one organization. Pieces do not have to be by the same person. May or may not be a series. One entry per organization. Judges will review URLs for web or digital content and PDFs for print.
- For Sweepstakes, there is no entry to submit as winners are determined by point totals.

- **Note on file names:** please include a headline or slug & abbreviated publication name when naming files to help judges identify entries. Example: baseball-nyt.pdf is better than page1.pdf or untitled1.jpg.

2025 ICPA Contest Categories

NOTE: the ACES contest website refers to the contest categories as classes.

Open (for all media programs)

1. Editorial Cartoon (include a brief explanatory note for cartoon of narrowly local content). Submit single PDF or URL.
2. Entertainment Supplement — online or print. Submit a single PDF for print entries that contains all pages in one file. For online or digital entries, submit the URL. Judges will review PDFs for print submissions and URLs for digital submissions.
3. Special Supplement — online or print, excluding entertainment. Submit a single PDF for print entries that contains all pages in one file. For online or digital entries, submit the URL. Judges will review PDFs for print submissions and URLs for digital submissions.
4. Graphic Illustration (hand-drawn line art, illustrations, charts or graphs that complement news, editorial or features copy in package. Submit a single PDF for print entries. For online or digital entries, submit the URL. Judges will review PDFs for print submissions and URLs for digital submissions.
5. Critical Review – Film
6. Critical Review – Other Than Film
7. Advertisement – Best Print Ad (staff-produced for outside client or in-house promotion). Submit a single PDF.
8. Advertisement – Best Digital Ad (staff-produced for outside client or in-house promotion). Submit a single PDF.
9. Newsletter – Judges will consider the quality of writing, design, subject matter and overall impact of the e-newsletter. Submit as a single PDF or URL.
10. Podcast – News (30 minutes maximum running time). Submit URL.
11. Podcast – Sports (30 minutes maximum running time). Submit URL.
12. Podcast – Entertainment & Culture (30 minutes maximum running time). Submit URL.

By Division

Divisions are as follows based on Fall 2025 enrollment data:

- B. Schools 7,000 or larger
- C. Schools 2300 to 6,999
- D. Schools fewer than 2300

13. General Excellence – Print: Three complete editions published within contest timeframe. Only one entry per school. (Three complete issues constitute one entry; submit one PDF). Judges look for quality of writing, reporting, coverage and content; leadership in opinion content; in-depth reporting; effective use of headlines; quality of photography; visual appeal of design, art and graphics.
14. General Excellence – Web: Ease of navigation and visual appeal; effective use of multimedia and visuals; quality of writing, reporting, coverage and content; leadership in opinion content; in-depth reporting. Submit your publication's URL.
15. Front Page Layout: Three front pages of the newspaper's choice. Only one entry per school. Print entries must be submitted as a single PDF containing all three front pages. For digital entries submit three separate URLs that display the front pages from a stand-alone digital edition in a clearly accessible format.
16. Editorial (unsigned opinion of the newspaper's editorial board)
17. Opinion Page(s) to be judged on both layout and content; Submit single PDF with for print entries. For online or digital entries, submit the URL. Judges will review PDFs for print submissions and URLs for digital submissions.
18. Column, (excluding sports). Submit single PDF or URL.
19. Feature Story (other than sports) Submit single PDF or URL.
20. Feature Page Design, for a single page or double-truk. Submit a single PDF for print entries. For online or digital entries, submit the URL. Judges will review PDFs for print submissions and URLs for digital submissions.
21. News Story (single story, can be accompanied by related sidebars published same day; Submit single PDF or URL)
22. Sports News Story (single story, can be accompanied by related sidebars published same day; Submit single PDF or URL)
23. Sports Game Story (covering a sporting event; written on deadline; Submit single PDF or URL)
24. Sports Feature Story (Submit single PDF or URL)
25. Sports Column (Submit single PDF or URL)
26. Sports Page Design, for a single page or double-truk. Submit a single PDF for print entries. For online or digital entries, submit the URL. Judges will review PDFs for

print submissions and URLs for digital submissions.

27. In-depth Reporting (single story or stories, either as a series or continuing coverage; Submit single PDF or URL)
28. Headline Writing (must include story) Submit single PDF or URL.
29. Photo Essay (series of related photos used to tell a story; may be accompanied by a text story; Submit single PDF or URL.
30. Feature Photo (including sports) Submit single PDF or URL.
31. Sports Photo (game or sideline/crowd action or reaction) Submit single PDF or URL.
32. News Photo (timely news value is important.) Submit single PDF or URL.
33. Video Storytelling (30 minutes maximum running time) Submit URL.
34. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Coverage (Eligible coverage will include but not be limited to race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and other differences. Judges will consider depth of coverage of the overall entry. An entry will consist of up to three pieces from one organization. Pieces do not have to be by the same person. May or may not be a series. One entry per organization. Judges will review URLs for web or digital content and PDFs for print.)

If you have any questions, please contact Jackie Spinner, ICPA 2nd Vice President, at jspinner@colum.edu. (Please put ICPA in the subject line)